

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 563

By Gilmore

A RESOLUTION to commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Fisk University.

WHEREAS, it is most fitting that the members of this General Assembly recognize the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Fisk University, "one of the great black universities in the nation"; and

WHEREAS, one of the "Six Sisters", African-American colleges founded and supported by the American Missionary Association, Fisk School, or Fisk Free Colored School, began its long and storied history on January 9, 1866, just six months after the end of the Civil War and two years after the Emancipation Proclamation, due to the vision, financial generosity, and hard work of John Ogden, the Reverend Erastus Milo Cravath, and the Reverend Edward P. Smith; and

WHEREAS, Fisk's dedication ceremony that historic day opened with a prayer delivered by African-American minister the Reverend Nelson Merry, pastor of the First Colored Baptist Church in Nashville; and

WHEREAS, speeches were delivered by General Clinton Bowen Fisk, United States Army Chief Chaplain and leader of the American Missionary Association in Tennessee and head of the Tennessee and Kentucky Freedmen's Bureau, for whom the school is named and who helped secure the real estate therefor from the federal government; John Ogden of the Western Freedmen's Aid Society, who was later named the school's first principal; and the Reverend Erastus Milo Cravath, who became the school's first president. Governor of the State of Tennessee, the Honorable William G. Brownlow, gave the keynote address for the occasion, and other local politicians and educators also spoke; and

WHEREAS, after the Tennessee General Assembly passed legislation providing for free primary public education in the state, Fisk changed the focal point of its mission to higher education and was re-chartered and incorporated as Fisk University on August 22, 1867; and

WHEREAS, in addition to Mr. Ogden, Reverend Cravath, and General Fisk, Nelson Walker and Richard Harris, African-American businessmen, signed Fisk University's incorporation papers; Mr. Harris later became the first African-American member of the Fisk University Board of Trustees, and his son, also named Richard Harris, was one of Fisk's first African-American faculty members; and

WHEREAS, 150 years later, the dreams of Fisk's founders have been realized far beyond their expectations; in 1873, Fisk relocated to its present site and has developed into a first-class liberal arts institution; and

WHEREAS, the Fisk campus was designated as a National Historic District in February 1978, in recognition of its architectural, historic, and cultural significance; and

WHEREAS, Fisk University is home to the world-famous Fisk Jubilee Singers, who have brought international acclaim to the prestigious university and whose first members performed for historical figures such as Mark Twain, President Ulysses S. Grant, Johann Strauss, and Queen Victoria; and

WHEREAS, the group was originally formed to raise funds for the then-struggling Fisk University; the Jubilee Singers accomplished this goal and raised enough money to build Jubilee Hall, the first permanent structure in the South for the education of black students and one of only twenty-seven buildings in Tennessee recognized as a National Historic Landmark; and

WHEREAS, Fisk faculty and alumni have been among America's intellectual, artistic, and civic leaders in every generation since the school's founding and include the cofounder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, W.E.B. DuBois; notable artist Aaron Douglas; Percy Lavon Julian, the first African-American chemist; and award-winning author Nikki Giovanni; and

WHEREAS, today, Fisk University continues to play a central role in the shaping of young black minds to become tomorrow's leaders; and

WHEREAS, on this historic occasion, the General Assembly wishes to honor the administration, faculty, staff, alumni, and students of Fisk University for their ongoing commitment to academic excellence in the African-American community; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED NINTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Fisk University, one of this nation's prominent historically black universities, as we pay tribute to Fisk's historic, cultural, and educational significance in American society.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.